

time. But this was a subject brought up by the distinguished majority leader, and I felt it was appropriate to answer. I have done the best I can in responding.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I have been advised by my colleague from North Dakota that he would like to follow me, so I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from North Dakota follow me for a period of 20 minutes. And then it is my understanding that the Senator from Ohio is in the queue, the Senator from Ohio being Mr. DEWINE. So I ask unanimous consent that be the order.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Hearing none, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Florida is recognized.

FEMA

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, to follow up on one of the things we did accomplish in the Senate, passing last night the Department of Homeland Defense appropriations bill, I want to call to the attention of the Senate three amendments this Senator from Florida had attached to the bill which were passed. They regard FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This, of course, has been extremely important to the Nation, but particularly to my State of Florida, having gone through the experience of four hurricanes last year within a 6-week period.

Originally, FEMA did a very good job. A lot of that was as a result of the lessons we had learned from a decade previously from the monster hurricane of 1992, Hurricane Andrew, when one level of Government was not talking to another level. Those lessons learned were applied. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of those four hurricanes that hit Florida within that 6-week period, FEMA responded, and responded well, working with the State of Florida and the local governments, which in this case for those four hurricanes included most of the counties of Florida. Little did I know, going into August a year ago, I was going to end up visiting almost every emergency operations center in the State of Florida. But that is the fate that befell our State.

But then, in the long run, FEMA started dropping the ball. It was not because they did not have enough money. We appropriated \$13.5 billion—that is with a “B”—for hurricane relief. Of that \$13.5 billion, \$8.5 billion went to FEMA. It was not that it did not have enough money. But they started sending it to the wrong places. They sent over \$30 million to Miami-Dade County, when in fact the hurricane winds never blew in Miami-Dade County.

So one of the amendments has to do with them being required, under law,

to report back to the committee in the Senate and the committee in the House on all of the changes they have made in response to the recent inspector general's report that named all of these deficiencies in FEMA. One of them was sending millions of dollars into a county where the hurricane winds did not blow.

Another example was they paid for over 300 funerals, but the number of deaths directly attributable or even indirectly attributable to the hurricane was about 125. Why are we paying for that?

Over and over—I cannot tell you how many county commissioners and mayors were calling us, pleading: Why won't FEMA reimburse us for the debris removal? Over and over we had people saying: FEMA is not sending us any relief.

What is the purpose of FEMA? It is to help people when they are in a time of need and it is authorized under law.

Well, lo and behold, do you know what the most recent one is? It is exactly the reverse. Just a month ago, FEMA sent out \$27 million in payments to people; and now, as of 2 weeks ago, it is demanding the people send it back. They said they made a mistake, that they were not eligible for that—\$27 million?

Well, thank goodness the Governmental Affairs Committee of the Senate, at my request, had an investigation and a hearing. They allowed the senior Senator from Florida to be the leadoff witness. Of course, I chronicled a number of these instances.

So we attached to the legislation that passed last night—the Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill—amendments that will require FEMA to report back to these committees on the changes that have been made in response to these deficiencies that were noticed by the Inspector General's report.

But we also put on an amendment that will require FEMA to issue consistent and uniform guidelines for the local governments regarding their reimbursement for hurricane debris removal. This was what was so frustrating to our local governments because in one county FEMA would reimburse the local government for the debris removal and in another county it would not. You had this inconsistency. So in our oversight of the executive branch, it is our responsibility to make it. I am happy to say we passed this on this bill.

The third amendment was just a commonsense amendment. Do you know what happened? Last year, they were hiring inspectors to go into homes. The inspector general's report pointed out that those inspectors did not have very much training. Therefore, they were just writing checks left and right, not knowing what they were doing. They would write, for example, a reimbursement for a demolished house and all the accoutrements and complete furnishings, but, in fact, that

house did not have any furnishings. If the inspector had asked, FEMA would have known. Well, that is going to be dealt with, with the amendment, with them coming back and reporting on the inspector general's report.

But do you know what else happened? FEMA allowed inspectors to go in, examine a house, and make a determination. But, lo and behold, they then came back, and those inspectors bought those houses at bargain basement prices, when the homeowner was desperate for cash, at below fair market value. The inspector was profiting as a result of the inspector having been hired, representing the U.S. Government, FEMA, to go in there and help the people, and then coming around and taking advantage of the people in their depleted condition.

So we added an amendment, last night, that is going to prohibit those inspectors from entering into contracts with people when they inspect their property. It is common sense.

There is one thing more I want to inform our colleagues in the Senate. When I arrived at the emergency operations center in the State of Florida Sunday afternoon, just before the hurricane hit—at the time when it was about 3 hours out from landfall, it was a category 4—we thought the poor people of Pensacola were going to be absolutely devastated again from the effects they had 10 months ago with Hurricane Ivan, when it hit with such ferociousness. Well, in those intervening hours, by landfall, it had come down from a category 4 to a category 2. By the way, the differential between 145 miles an hour and 125 miles an hour does not sound like much—that is 20 miles an hour—but the differential is exponential in its destructive force. When I arrived at the emergency operations center—and we were so apprehensive—immediately, several people in the State of Florida EOC came up to me and said: Senator, we want to thank you for standing up and opposing legislation that has been filed in the Senate.

It is legislation that was referred to our Senate Commerce Committee, legislation that would require the National Weather Service to take their Web site off the Internet, under the legislation filed, if there is a competing weather service offered by a commercial entity.

In this particular legislation, it is a commercial entity in the State of the Senator who offered the legislation called AccuWeather. What those people in the Florida EOC wanted me to know was that AccuWeather, on Saturday before the hurricane hit on Sunday, had been predicting it was going in to New Orleans or Mississippi, whereas the National Weather Service, through the National Hurricane Center, had that track coming straight to an area between Pensacola and Ft. Walton Beach, exactly the track where the hurricane hit.

If we had not had the National Weather Service accuracy available to